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Government Violates Guidelines and Allows Further Destruction of Endangered Caribou Habitat

Interim strategies to protect caribou were agreed to in 2006 by all members of the West Central Caribou Landscape Team, including government and industry, to prevent further degradation of the caribou range in the Foothills of western Alberta. The best remaining parts of the caribou ranges (intact patches) were identified. One of the most important of the interim strategies is to minimize further fragmentation of intact patches. It has been recently learned that government continues to permit industrial use in these intact areas, including the Little Smoky Range, where a caribou herd is at immediate risk of elimination. Government refuses to give out information on where the use is occurring.

“I am the only attending public member of the Landscape Team, all the others work for either industry or government,” says Helene Walsh of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Northern Alberta Chapter. “I have just recently found out that industrial activity has been approved in the intact portion of the Little Smoky Range, but when I asked for information on where, I was told that the government will not provide that information. Government says that they are implementing the guidelines but their track record on looking after the interests of the Little Smoky caribou is dismal.”

“The Government has also been asked to report on permitted activity in the range last year in possible contravention of the interim strategies, but only prepared a report from April 2007 onwards after the height of winter industrial activity,” says Cliff Wallis, Vice-President of the Alberta Wilderness Association. They are obviously ashamed of their failure to implement the guidelines and are trying to hide the truth from Albertans.”

Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) is responsible for management of caribou, and under their direction the Little Smoky herd has been in decline for decades in spite of many government assurances that caribou populations would be maintained. Ms. Walsh spoke to Ted Morton the Minister of SRD in early December and made him aware of the struggles of the Landscape Team and the resulting gloomy prospects for caribou and asked him to intervene in the recovery process for the benefit of caribou.

“I hand delivered a letter to Mr. Morton, and to date have received no response. Now I find out the interim strategies are not being honoured. This is unacceptable. The situation for this herd is urgent and government continues to make its recovery more and more difficult by letting out new leases and permitting further development in the range,” says Walsh. “With respect to Land Use Planning, Albertans have overwhelmingly indicated they expect wildlife habitat to be protected. By their actions, the Alberta government has shown itself to be indifferent to public opinion, the plight of the caribou and the rapid disappearance of critical habitat. The future of caribou in Alberta remains grim.”

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